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Authoritarian Resilience and Regime Cohesion in Morocco after the Arab Spring

Abstract

This article argues that Morocco's competitive authoritarian regime is more resilient today in certain key respects than it was when the Arab Spring began. Drawing on Levitsky and Way's dimension of organisational power, the paper contends the regime was sufficiently unnerved by the unrest to resort to the use of high intensity coercion as part of its response to 20 February Movement. The article maintains that, in employing this force successfully, the regime has turned the protests into an important source of non-material cohesion for its security apparatus and thereby enhanced its ability to defend itself from similar challenges in the future.

Keywords

Morocco; Arab Spring; competitive authoritarian; authoritarian resilience; security forces; Levitsky and Way

Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyse the impact of the Arab Spring on the cohesion of Morocco's security apparatus and the resilience of its competitive authoritarian order.¹ The paper argues that the unprecedented size and intensity of the protests, along with the extraordinary regional context in which

they occurred, convinced the regime that its grip on power was under threat. This fear led it to authorise its security forces to use high intensity coercion to break-up demonstrations and intimidate protestors. These forces used violence to disperse a number of rallies and marches held in various locations throughout the spring and summer of 2011. Coercion, therefore, quickly became part of the regime's multi-faceted response to the unrest.

The article draws on Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way's dimension of organisational power to argue that the Moroccan regime's interpretation of the protests as a potentially revolutionary moment, coupled with its successful use of high intensity coercion, has established the Arab Spring as an important new source of non-material cohesion for the country's security forces that has not only enhanced their ability to deal with any similar demonstrations in the future, but also reinforced their commitment to defend the country's existing competitive authoritarian order. In responding to and surviving the Arab Spring in the ways that it did, the regime has augmented its capacity to withstand any similar protests for however long this cohesion endures.²

The article defines the Moroccan regime as the *makhzen*. The term originally meant 'storehouse', but now 'refers to "the apparatus of power, constituted as a chain from the sovereign who receives his power from God and passing without interruption down through the ministers, governors, and local authorities ...

to the doorman'''³ Thus, the '*makhzen* is "the place where power is concentrated and the resources used to exercise it are concentrated"'⁴ It refers, therefore, to 'the palace and its [formal and customary] clients' who, together, not only 'dictate the main lines of policy' but also 'act as a gatekeeper for any kind of political reform'.⁵

In advancing this argument, the article makes a series of important and original contributions. The first is on the survival and ongoing resilience of Morocco's authoritarian regime. The article demonstrates that the Arab Spring, far from weakening the regime, has enhanced its hardiness in at least one important respect. In making this point, the article confirms Sean Yom and Gregory Gause's observation that regimes that 'survive[] close calls with destruction' often do so 'not because they have never faced such threats in the first place', but because they have done so successfully in the past.⁶ The second is on the rehabilitation of the authoritarian resilience paradigm. By drawing on Levitsky and Way's dimension of organisational power, the article highlights and utilises a thesis that has not been used in this way in this context before, and seeks to challenge the sorts of assumption that resulted in so many scholars being caught off guard. The third is on what constitutes a revolutionary experience. By charting and examining how the protests have become a source of non-material cohesion, the article adds depth to this aspect of Levitsky and Way's thesis. And the fourth is on how established regimes try

to protect themselves. By examining the impact of wider societal pressures on the resilience of Morocco's regime, the article counter-balances a tendency within the 'coup-proofing' literature to focus on 'endogenous factors', on how incumbents remodel their security forces and the effectiveness of their efforts to do so.⁷

To sustain this analysis and argument, the article is divided into three main parts. The first gives an overview of Levitsky and Way's model, paying particular attention to their notions of competitive authoritarianism, organisational power, and coercive strength and cohesion. The second then briefly applies their thesis to Morocco and explains how and why the kingdom remains competitive authoritarian. And the third extends this analysis by detailing how the regime's response to the Arab Spring has turned the protests into a source of non-material cohesion for the security forces.

Levitsky and Way's key concepts

Levitsky and Way were moved to develop their model by their dissatisfaction with existing explanations of regime transition during the so-called Third Wave of democratisation. They argued that too many of these accounts contained at least one of two important omissions. The first is born of a false assumption: that hybrid regimes are destined to liberalise because they display some democratic tendencies.⁸ Levitsky and Way contend that hybridity is not a stage in a linear process, but a state

in which regimes can remain for prolonged periods of time. And the second is the under-examination of 'relations between the international environment and regime change'.⁹

Levitsky and Way also reject all existing descriptions of hybrid regimes on the grounds that 'competitive authoritarianism is a new phenomenon'.¹⁰ They maintain that labels such as electoral-, illiberal-, defective-, managed- and quasi-democracy place too much emphasis on democratic structures and processes.¹¹ Conversely, they argue that categorisations like post-totalitarianism and bureaucratic authoritarianism do not permit enough competition.¹² And while they acknowledge that terms such as electoral authoritarianism and semi-authoritarianism better describe the types of regime to which they are referring, they contend that these descriptions fail to distinguish between 'competitive and hegemonic' authoritarian rule and are therefore too broad.¹³ Thus, they devise and adopt a new label: competitive authoritarian.

Competitive authoritarian regimes are different from full dictatorships as 'constitutional channels exist [within them] through which opposition groups [can] compete in a meaningful way for executive power'. 'Elections are held regularly' and 'opposition activity is above ground'. This means that rival parties can 'open offices, recruit candidates, and organize campaigns', and that their leaders 'are rarely exiled or imprisoned'. Nevertheless, these regimes are not fully democratic because 'incumbent abuse of the state violates at

least one of three defining attributes of democracy: (1) free elections, (2) broad protection of civil liberties, and (3) a reasonably level playing field'.¹⁴

These various discontents inform the structure, focus and purpose of Levitsky and Way's model. Its primary functions are to explain the sharp rise in the number of competitive authoritarian regimes in the world from the early 1990s onwards, and to identify and order the critical factors that shape and direct their political evolution. Accordingly, it places more emphasis on the changes that have taken place in the international system as a result of the end of the Cold War than most other frameworks.¹⁵ One of the developments it focuses most heavily on is the establishment of the West as the world's 'dominant center of economic and military power'.¹⁶ It identifies this outcome as especially important on the grounds that it both marked and hastened the ideational and material decline of authoritarianism. With the Soviet Union's demise, Western governments felt freer to call for the reform of dictatorial regimes. And with much of the world's remaining development resources concentrated in their hands, their ability to press their demands was enhanced.¹⁷

The United States and European Union, therefore, are accorded central roles in Levitsky and Way's model. They are presented as bastions of democracy, and as the most important proponents and agents of political liberalisation around the world. Proximity to their borders and shared pasts with them -

even if born of imperial conquest or military occupation – both facilitate and stimulate democratisation. Their centrality to the model, along with the ways in which their influence on a country can be traced and measured, are captured and detailed by the dimensions of linkage and leverage. Thus, two of the framework's three parts (the other is organisational power) focus on the international, on the actions of powerful foreign governments and institutions in the aftermath of a seismic upheaval in the global system.

Linkage denotes the 'density of ties (economic, political, diplomatic, social, and organizational) and cross-border flows (of capital, goods and services, people and information) among particular countries and the United States, the EU ... and Western dominated multilateral institutions'.¹⁸ Leverage refers to a regime's 'ability to avoid [and cope with] Western action aimed at punishing abuse or encouraging political liberalization'.¹⁹ An important determinant of a regime's capacity to withstand such pressure is whether it has the backing of a Black Knight patron, a militarily or economically powerful state that wants to limit or to counter the West's influence or attempts to spread democracy.²⁰ Finally, organisational power encompasses the 'scope and cohesion of [a regime's] state and governing-party structures'.²¹

This structural weighting is reinforced by the order in which Levitsky and Way's thesis unfolds. They grade the West's or the regime's capacity under each dimension high, medium or

low. These classifications are determined by assessing a country/regime against sets of pre-determined criteria.²² When linkage is high democratisation is probable because the 'extensive penetration by international media, transnational human-rights networks, and multilateral organizations' of the target country ensure that 'even minor abuses [perpetrated by its regime] are likely to trigger responses' from either the US and/or the EU.²³ Linkage should also have a 'democratizing effect even where organizational power is high' as long as leverage is high. But when the West's leverage over a regime is low 'even relatively weak incumbents are likely to survive, for they will encounter limited external democratizing pressure'.²⁴

A regime's organisational power is based on the scope and cohesion of its ruling party and coercive apparatus, and to a lesser extent the amount of discretionary control it exercises over the national economy. Scope is determined by the breadth and depth of the party's and apparatus's presence in the country, their respective abilities to operate effectively across the national territory and at very local levels ('village and/or neighborhood').²⁵ Cohesion is decided by material and ideational factors, the amount of financial and other support provided by the regime, and the extent to which the party's and apparatus's members and leaders share a common ethnicity or ideology (in a society in which such bonds and beliefs matter), or a 'military conflict' (such as actively participating in a successful war, revolution or anti-colonial struggle).²⁶ Crucially, 'cohesion

tends to be greater when it is rooted in nonmaterial ties' and 'bonds of solidarity forged out of periods of violent struggle are perhaps the most robust' of all.²⁷

Levitsky and Way argue that the 'coercive capacity' of authoritarian regimes - both competitive and hegemonic - is vital to their ongoing stability and longer-term endurance.²⁸ They contend that the regimes that are most likely to survive, are those best able 'to either prevent or crack down on opposition' protests.²⁹ They go on to identify two broad types of coercion: low and high intensity. The former can take 'myriad forms' including surveillance, 'low-profile physical harassment, or localized attacks on opposition activists and supporters'. It can also take 'non-physical forms' such as the withholding of 'employment, scholarships, or university entrance to opposition activists; the deprivation of 'public services ... to individuals and communities with ties' to political rivals; and the 'use of tax, regulatory, or other state agencies to investigate and prosecute opposition politicians, entrepreneurs, and media owners'.³⁰ While low intensity coercion is important to competitive authoritarian regimes such acts 'do not involve high-profile targets and thus rarely make headlines or trigger international condemnation'.³¹ In contrast, high intensity coercion comprises 'highly-visible acts that target large numbers of people, well-known individuals, or major institutions'.³²

According to Levitsky and Way, high intensity coercion both relies upon and helps generate strong cohesion within a security apparatus, and between that apparatus and the regime it serves. High intensity coercion helps engender cohesion by binding the fate of those carrying out the repression to the regime on whose behalf they are acting. For such is the domestic and international exposure of these individuals that if they fail 'and the regime collapses, they will be vulnerable to retribution'.³³ And high intensity coercion can help enhance cohesion by manufacturing an experience that has been 'forged in a context of violent struggle' that binds those involved together.³⁴

Levitsky and Way do not specify, however, which types of struggle or what level of violence generate the greatest number of or strongest non-material ties. Nor do they set any limit beyond 'recent' on how long these experiences remain effective, can produce and sustain such bonds.³⁵ Way establishes a broad timeframe with his observation that the Communist regimes 'that outlasted the end of the Cold War - China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, Vietnam - were all led by veterans of revolutionary struggles'.³⁶ On this basis, the amount of time that elapses once a war, revolution or anti-colonial campaign is over is of secondary importance. For what matters are the personnel, whether power continues to be held by men and women with direct and personal experience of that struggle. Recent, therefore, can mean or stretch to several decades.

Morocco: linkage, leverage and organisational power

Ostensibly, Morocco is a difficult country to which to apply Levitsky and Way's model. They reject the kingdom as a possible case study for their own 2010 book on the grounds that its 'most important executive office is not elected' and, as such, 'generates a distinct set of dynamics and challenges not found under competitive authoritarianism.'³⁷ They do not, however, insist that their model can *never* be applied to the country. And while the king might not have to submit to the vote to retain his position, neither he nor the institution of the monarchy is disinterested in, or unaffected by, elections.³⁸ Indeed, the occurrence, conduct and outcomes of these ballots matter deeply to him and to the throne's ongoing position within Moroccan politics. For this reason, therefore, the article contends that Levitsky and Way's model can, and should, be applied to the country.³⁹

Morocco first made the transition from full to competitive authoritarianism in the late 1990s when, in accordance with King Hassan's doctrine of *alternance*, the regime began holding regular, and partially free and fair multi-party elections. It has remained in this governance condition ever since, emerging from the Arab Spring scarcely any more democratic - and not really any more authoritarian - than it was when the protests began. Despite the constitutional, and other political, reforms the regime introduced in response to the unrest, most meaningful

authority is still invested in the same institutions as before, most notably, the monarchy. And while the king is bound more tightly by election results than previously and is now obliged to consult with his prime minister on a wider range of issues,⁴⁰ he retains decisive control over many of the country's key political institutions. Not only does he preside over the Council of Ministers, the Superior Council of the Judiciary, the Superior Council of the Ulema, the Superior Council of Security and the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces, but he is Commander of the Faithful and appoints the president, and half the members of, the Constitutional Court.⁴¹ He is an executive, rather than constitutional, monarch.⁴² Thus, the kingdom conforms to two of Levitsky and Way's foundational observations: that not every country that liberalises its political system becomes fully democratic; and regimes can remain in this hybrid, competitive authoritarian state for many years at a time.

The European Union has high linkage to Morocco across all six sub-dimensions of connection.⁴³ The kingdom has joined each of the EU's policy frameworks for the region at the earliest opportunity and is the only North African country to be granted Advanced Status by Brussels.⁴⁴ It conducts more trade with the bloc than the rest of the world put together while the remittances from its expatriates - 84 percent of whom live in Europe - were worth an average of \$6.76 billion a year between 2010 and 2013.⁴⁵ Its students have long comprised the largest overseas contingent in France's universities,⁴⁶ and over half of

the members (56 percent) of the current government studied in either Europe or North America.⁴⁷ Millions of its citizens live in the EU,⁴⁸ and thousands of Europeans regularly holiday in the kingdom.⁴⁹ 57.1 percent of its citizens have access to the internet and a remarkable 126.9 percent own mobile phones.⁵⁰ And a wide range of trans-Mediterranean civil society groups are active within in its borders, including the important Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (Réseau Euro-Méditerranéen des Droits de l'Homme, EMDH).⁵¹

Despite the range and strength of these ties, the EU's leverage over Morocco is still only low because the country has a large economy (\$100.6 billion, 2015).⁵² Furthermore, the European Union and the wider West have long shown little desire to discipline the Moroccan regime into changing its political behaviour. Thus, the kingdom's organisational power holds the key to whether it is susceptible to whatever democratising pressure Brussels is willing and able to put on it.

Morocco's organisational power is high primarily because it has a large and capable security apparatus which offsets the absence of a dominant ruling party. Unlike other competitive authoritarian orders, most notably Ben Ali's Tunisia, the Moroccan regime has never relied on a single party to dominate and control the political process. On the contrary, the *makhzen* continues to cultivate and co-opt several parties at once so as never to depend entirely on any one of them to exercise its will and pursue its interests. Since the introduction of *alternance*,

the Istiqlal (Hizb al-Istiqlal/Parti d'Independence), Authenticity and Modernity Party (Parti Authenticité et Modernité, PAM), National Rally of Independents (Rassemblement National des Indépendents, RNI), the Popular Movement (Mouvement Populaire, MP), Constitutional Union (Union Constitutionnelle, UC) and even the Justice and Development Party (Parti de la Justice et du Développement, PJD) have all received help and encouragement from the regime, but never to the extent that any one of them has been able to achieve absolute preponderance over all the others or emerge as a rival locus of power to the *makhzen*.

To weaken the popularity and decrease the potential influence on the monarchy of the largest parties still further, including those that had sworn and demonstrated their loyalty to the palace, both King Hassan II and King Mohammed VI permitted and encouraged the establishment of several new political groups. In addition to drawing off votes and support from everyone else, many of these new bodies broke away from existing parties. Some of those to do so were the Democratic and Social Movement (Mouvement Démocratique et Social, MDS) which split from the National Popular Movement (Mouvement National Populaire, MNP) in 1996, the Socialist Democratic Party (Parti Socialiste Démocratique, PSD) which left the Organisation of Democratic and Popular Action (Organisation de l'Action Démocratique et Populaire, OADP) in 1997, the Reform and Development Party (Parti de la Reforme et Développement, PRD)

which broke from the RNI in 1997, and the Moroccan Union for Democracy (Union Marocaine pour la Démocratie, MD) which parted from the UC in 2006.⁵³ The creation of these new parties weakened those out of which they emerged. Some, such as the MNP, were founded precisely for this purpose by figures with strong ties to the palace.

Prior to the Arab Spring, the king's ability to play the country's leading political parties off against each another was further enhanced by his constitutional right to offer the premiership to whomever he chose rather than to the leader of the party that won the most votes in a general election. In the constitution introduced in 2011 in response to the protests, this right has been ended. Nevertheless, the king retains many significant powers and has given no indication of refraining from pitting the parties against one another.

Morocco's security apparatus has had high scope since before the Arab Spring began. It has penetrated society to the level of the village and the neighbourhood across the whole country. The depth and extent of its presence is in response to the various serious challenges the regime continues to face. These include resisting Polisario in the Western Sahara, policing and countering Islamist extremists and terrorists in the main urban centres, and monitoring and containing dissent in regions that have long resisted and agitated against Rabat's authority like the Rif Valley. The Moroccan regime has always spent heavily, therefore, on its armed forces. Between 2003 and

2013, its per capita investment in its military increased year on year so that by the end of this period it was spending over twice as much per head of population than it was a decade earlier. This sustained expenditure helped ensure that these forces had both high scope and high material cohesion by the time the Arab Spring began.

In response to the protests, the regime increased its defence spending by even greater margins. In 2011, the year in which the Arab Spring first began in Morocco, it spent \$101.7 per head of population on its armed forces. In 2012, it increased this amount to \$102.1 before committing \$120.2 in 2013 and \$118.0 in 2014.⁵⁴ These raises meant that defence spending formed a greater portion of the government's total annual expenditure than ever before. In both 2011 and 2012, 9.8 percent of government outlay went on the armed forces whereas in 2013 and 2014 11.6 percent and 11.2 percent did.⁵⁵ And this trend of committing a greater portion of the national budget to the military has continued with 10.7 percent of total government disbursements going on defence in 2017. In the same year, the Tunisian, Egyptian and French governments, by comparison, dedicated 6.9 percent, 4.6 percent and 4.0 percent of their total annual expenditure to their armed forces.⁵⁶ The regime's sustained investment in its armed forces means that they are able to maintain high scope and high material cohesion in addition to the high non-material cohesion that the experience of successfully resisting the Arab Spring protestors has given

them. Thus, the regime does not miss the Black Knight patron it does not have.

The Moroccan regime, the Arab Spring and non-material cohesion

The apparent seriousness of the Arab Spring protests in Morocco was determined by a range of domestic and international factors including the size of the demonstrations, the composition of 20 February Movement, the broader regional context in which they took place and the West's reaction to them. The protests began on 20 February 2011 when between 150,000 and 200,000 people took to the streets in 53 cities.⁵⁷ Even though these were not the first serious demonstrations ever staged in Morocco and their size was contested by the organisers and the regime,⁵⁸ they still involved tens of thousands of people making them the largest held in the country since independence.

This opening burst of unrest was arguably the highpoint of the Arab Spring in Morocco. The momentum surrounding the initial demonstrations was maintained over the next few weeks largely by the anger with which the public greeted the regime's heavy-handed treatment of some protestors and various opposition groups.⁵⁹ Yet after King Mohammed's speech of 9 March, the movement went into slow, but inexorable decline. What rallies it organised from that point on not only took place with growing irregularity, but were attended by ever fewer people representing an increasingly narrow cross section of society.⁶⁰ It failed 'to rouse the masses' and, thus, 'hit a ceiling' of

what it was likely to achieve 'within months of the first demonstration' being held.⁶¹

Yet the scale and significance of 20 February Movement's shortcomings were not immediately apparent. Indeed, its failure to motivate the masses and sustain, let alone escalate, its campaign was due in no small measure to the speed and focus of the regime's response. 'Mohammed quickly realized that the protests posed a potentially serious test to his rule and placed himself at the forefront of reform, taking the momentum away from the opposition'.⁶² By announcing the creation of a Royal Commission to review the country's constitution in his speech of 9 March 2011, the king not only sought to assuage at least some of the demands being made by 20 February Movement, but to shift 'the public debate away from the grievances on the street to the ... reforms that might be on the cards' and thereby restore 'the monarchy and the parties' to the heart of the political process.⁶³ The threat to the established order posed by the demonstrations, therefore, was curtailed in part by the king's timely and well-pitched intervention.

His adroit handling of the situation, however, spoke of the extent of his concern. While his actions may have helped hobble 20 February Movement, they were nevertheless motivated by a very real fear of what might happen if the organisation was permitted to continue unchecked. The fleetness of his response along with the breadth and seeming significance of what he appeared to be offering betrayed the scale of his misgivings. He set out to

capture the initiative and marginalise the movement not because he thought it was weak and failing, but because of what he feared it might become and potentially achieve.

King Mohammed's concerns were born, to a significant extent, of events elsewhere in the region.⁶⁴ While the regime had known unrest before, it had never previously been confronted by protests that were so 'clearly informed' by what was taking place in neighbouring countries.⁶⁵ Neither the February protests nor the body that organised them transpired or operated in a historical-political vacuum. They were each local expressions of a discontent that was not only transnational, but had, by the time the first demonstrations were held in Morocco, driven Tunisia's president of 23 years into exile, plunged Egypt into the intense unrest that was to lead to Mubarak's overthrow, and triggered the start of the violence that was to turn into the Libyan civil war. The Moroccan demonstrations and 20 February Movement, therefore, were inextricably linked to this broader context, features of which, were deeply troubling to the king and the regime.

And their fears were heightened still further by the make-up of the protest movement itself. Ostensibly, 'Morocco was distinct from other cases during the Arab Spring' as the organisers of the demonstrations 'never escalat[ed] to the use of violent tactics'.⁶⁶ Indeed, on no occasion did 20 February Movement either call upon or overtly encourage its followers to physically attack or take up arms against the state.

Furthermore, its 'long list of demands' did not include 'the removal of ... King Mohammed ..., only a limit on his royal powers'.⁶⁷ Throughout the Arab Spring, therefore, 20 February Movement refrained from either advocating violence or advancing an agenda that was so revolutionary in what it sought to achieve that the use of force was an inevitable corollary.

Yet not all of 20 February Movement's partners and fellow travellers shared these goals. 'Although moderate, secular youth helped propel ... [the protests] initially, leftist parties and Islamists filled out the ranks of the movement as it mushroomed'.⁶⁸ And one of the groups that came to play an active role in the orchestration and management of the demonstrations was the Justice and Charity association (Justice et Bienfaisance/Al-Adl Wal-Ihsan, AWI).⁶⁹ Established by Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine in 1987, and headed since his death in 2012 by Mohammed Abbadi, it 'is a powerful political and social player that attempts to bring about political change through social activism'.⁷⁰ And one of its most important and enduring objectives is to bring about the 'weakening or abolition' of the monarchy.⁷¹ Its tenacious commitment to this goal accounts for the regime's continued refusal to grant it official party status. Furthermore, its involvement in the protests encouraged the regime to view 20 February Movement with greater wariness. In the eyes of the authorities, therefore, the Movement was tainted by association.

In addition to encouraging the regime to question and doubt 20 February Movement's goals and motivations, the AWI's involvement in the protests allowed the authorities to link the movement to other more extreme groups and bodies. In so doing, it was able to exploit a fear that it had long inculcated in the Moroccan public: that the main instigators and beneficiaries of any serious instability that might develop, of the type that was rapidly taking hold in Egypt and Libya, would be Islamist terror groups and other violent factions. Popular concern over the likelihood and possible consequences of greater unrest in the country were heightened still further by the suicide attack on a popular tourist café in Marrakech on 28 April 2011.⁷² For many Moroccans, this bombing seemed to confirm their worst fears: that the tide of violence that they had seen engulf other parts of the region was gradually rising in their own country.

By means of the state-run media, the regime assiduously cultivated this fear by linking 20 February Movement to an incongruous range of armed outfits. In addition to 'extreme Islamists and leftists bent on destabilizing the country', the organisation was accused of receiving help and support from both Polisario and its main backer, the Algerian regime.⁷³ Notwithstanding the deep ideological and political divisions between some of these parties - which made their alleged convergence on this single organisation all the more unlikely - the Movement was charged with fraternising with nearly all of Morocco's most dangerous enemies. That the regime went to such

lengths to discredit and damage 20 February Movement provides further confirmation of just how fearful it was of the protests. Not because it necessarily believed all the accusations that it levelled against the Movement, but because it felt that it had to make these claims in the first place. It tried and succeeded in presenting the Movement not so much as a threat to the regime, but to the safety and integrity of the country's citizens and territory. In this way, it turned its enemies into those of Morocco and bound its survival to that of the entire country.

Just as the regime's fears were shaped by what was taking place elsewhere in the region, so its response to the protests was conditioned by broader international factors. It noted the very different reactions of France, the United States and other key Western actors towards Ben Ali and Gadhafi.⁷⁴ NATO's intervention in Libya helped persuade it to moderate its use of force against 20 February Movement, not to pursue its opponents with quite the same vengeful vehemence with which Gadhafi was pursuing his rivals.⁷⁵ Simultaneously, however, France's decision not to press for regime change in Tunisia helped reassure it that it might not suffer the same fate as Libya.⁷⁶ Its concerns were further allayed when, in response to King Mohammed's speech of 9 March, President Sarkozy praised the *makhzen's* 'deft management of the situation' and development of 'a much-needed "third way" to handling demands for political change'.⁷⁷ Thus, 'at the height of the Moroccan protests' Western governments put

no additional pressure on Rabat to introduce democratic reforms.⁷⁸

From early on in the Arab Spring, therefore, the regime was emboldened and empowered by the West to continue following its current course of action, which included using high intensity coercion against the protestors. And while NATO's military intervention in Libya suggested a greater willingness on the part of Western governments to oppose and depose authoritarian regimes in the region than in the recent past, its non-involvement in Tunisia and Egypt confirmed the limits of its appetite to force through political change. Furthermore, its commitment to ousting Gadhafi arguably made it less likely to intervene elsewhere in North Africa given the additional forces that it would have had to have generated to conduct such operations and the extra instability and insecurity that these actions would have created in the region in the short term at least.

Even though the West's sympathetic treatment of Morocco encouraged the regime to use high intensity coercion, it did not dispel the concern felt by many members of the ruling elite that the protests posed a significant threat to their grip on power. The regime's attempts to neutralise 20 February Movement took many forms including appropriating parts of its agenda, trying to lure away its supporters, smearing its leaders, and making 'minor concessions masked as major reforms'.⁷⁹ The regime also made judicious use of repression,⁸⁰ 'carefully calibrat[ing] the

actions of ... [the country's] coercive agencies to avoid the clumsy overreaction of some other rulers in the region'.⁸¹ Indeed, violence formed a central strand of its response from the outset. And what caution it exercised, was primarily due to its desire to avoid making the situation worse by giving the demonstrators another reason to take to the streets.

High intensity coercion was mainly used by the security forces,⁸² and the 'pro-government thugs' who sometimes supported them,⁸³ to break-up demonstrations and punish and intimidate protestors. Such violence was not practiced constantly for the duration of the Arab Spring, but in bursts mostly between late February and late March, early May and mid-June, and mid-July and early August 2011.⁸⁴ The security forces' response to the demonstrations in Casablanca on 13 March was especially savage and resulted in more than 20 protestors sustaining serious injuries including 'broken arms ... [and] head wounds'.⁸⁵ And their reaction to the demonstrations in Agadir, Casablanca, Tangiers and elsewhere on 22 May was perhaps even more ferocious and led to many protestors suffering 'life-threatening injuries'.⁸⁶ Then, on 30 May, security personnel in the city of Safi beat Kamal Ammari so severely that he died from his wounds three days later.⁸⁷ He was the first protestor to be killed by the country's security forces during the Arab Spring. His death helped breathe new life into 20 February Movement and led to more than 60,000 people taking to the streets on 5 June 2011.⁸⁸

Notwithstanding this brief upsurge, the security forces' effective use of high intensity coercion as part of a nationwide crackdown on the Arab Spring protests not only confirmed the extent of their scope, but also gave them a new source of non-material cohesion. The regime's fear that it was under threat from 20 February Movement imbued the demonstrations - in its eyes at least - with revolutionary potential. The regime's subsequent empowerment of the security forces to use violence to break up the protests and to try to weaken the Movement was a risk-laden decision that could, as Ammari's death showed, make its situation worse. The security forces' ultimately successful navigation of these risks and nullification of the demonstrations' revolutionary potential by means of high intensity coercion, therefore, has established the protests as a source of non-material solidarity for these forces and the regime.⁸⁹ This is not to suggest that the other aspects of the regime's response to the protests were unimportant, that they did not help Rabat deal with the challenge confronting it. Rather, that the regime's selective and successful use of high intensity coercion was a key facet of its response and has strengthened its ability to contend with similar situations in the future.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the Arab Spring, far from weakening Morocco's competitive authoritarian regime, has helped

strengthen it in at least one important way: by enhancing the non-material cohesion of the country's security apparatus and regime. Drawing on Levitsky and Way's dimension of organisational power, the article has shown that the Moroccan regime credited the protests with sufficient revolutionary potential to necessitate the use of high intensity coercion. In wielding this type of force successfully, the security apparatus transformed the Arab Spring into an important new source of non-material solidarity that is helping to fortify its own cohesion and ties to the regime.

This argument has three main parts. The first is the regime's alarm, the strength of its fear of what the protests and 20 February Movement represented, the danger that they posed to its configuration and continued grip on power. The regime's anxiety was born of perception, of how it viewed and construed the demonstrations. More specifically, the primary causes of its concerns were the Movement's composition and actions beyond what the organisation's leadership said and claimed. Similarly, the scale of the regime's fear was betrayed by its reaction to the unrest including its use of high intensity coercion. So even though the Movement did not call for the abolition of the monarchy, its early size and dynamism, collaboration with groups and bodies that did want to remove the king from power and clear association with events elsewhere in the region, meant that the regime viewed it and the protests that it orchestrated as significant threats.

The second part of the argument is the regime's use of force, its resort to high intensity coercion to disperse demonstrations and weaken 20 February Movement. That it did so, imbued the protests with sufficient revolutionary potential to turn them into a source of non-material cohesion for the security forces and regime. In making this point, the article extends Levitsky and Way's original thesis in at least two important ways: by completing the relationship between coercion and cohesion, and by adding detail to what can constitute a source of non-material solidarity. More specially, the article shows that the Moroccan regime's use of high intensity coercion provided evidence of the extent of the security forces' scope and cohesion which were then strengthened further by the experience of dealing with the protests.

And the third part of the argument is the regime's success, its effective use of high intensity coercion to help nullify and counteract the protests and 20 February Movement. These outcomes are critical to the transformation of the demonstrations into a source of non-material cohesion, to turning the unrest into a powerful collective memory that helps bind the members of the security apparatus to each other and to the regime they were defending. For if they had failed, not only could there have been less of the existing regime to protect, but their experience of the Arab Spring would have been negative not positive. And as such, it would scarcely serve as an empowering and instructive

reminiscence of what had been accomplished and could be done again if necessary.

In making this argument, the article has not only cast new light on Morocco's political development since the Arab Spring, but also made an important intervention in the process of 'rethinking' that scholars are engaged in following their collective failure to anticipate the start, spread and consequences of these protests.⁹⁰ Furthermore, it has employed a thesis and a framework that has the subtlety and nuance to help prevent specialists from succumbing to the sort of tunnel vision that so impaired their analyses in the years leading up to the start of the demonstrations. Finally, it has also contributed to the so-called coup-proofing literature by considering the interplay of endogenous and exogenous factors in ensuring regime survival.

¹ For the purposes of this article, Morocco's security apparatus includes: the Royal Moroccan Army (Armée Royale, AR), the Royal Guard (Garde Royale Marocaine, GRM), the Royal Moroccan Air Force (Forces Royales Air, FRA), the Royal Moroccan Navy (Marine Royale, MR), the Royal Moroccan Gendarmerie (Gendarmerie Royale Marocaine GRM), the Moroccan Auxiliary Forces (Forces Auxiliaires Marocaines, FAM) the State Police (Direction Générale de la Sûreté Nationale, DGSN), and the General Directorate for Territorial Surveillance (Direction Générale de la Surveillance du Territoire, DGST). The AR, GRM, FRA, MR and GRM fall under the authority of the Ministry of the Defence, while the FAM, DGSN and DGST come under that of the Ministry of the Interior.

² Lucan Way suggests that these experiences can remain effective as sources of non-material cohesion for the lifetimes of the individuals (security forces personnel and regime members) directly involved in them. L.A. Way, 'Comparing the Arab Revolts: The Lessons of 1989', *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 22 (2011), pp. 17-27, at 20.

³ A. Hamblin, *Morocco: The Struggle for Political Legitimacy*, in I.W. Zartman (ed.), *Arab Spring: Negotiating in the Shadow of the Intifadat* (Athens, Georgia and London: University of Georgia Press, 2015), pp. 182-208, at 184.

⁴ Ibid., p. 184.

⁵ K. Kausch, 'The European Union and Political Reform in Morocco', *Mediterranean Politics* Vol. 14 (2009), pp. 165-179, at 168.

⁶ S.L. Yom and F.G. Gause III, 'Resilient Royals: How Arab Monarchies Hang On', *Journal of Democracy* Vol. 23 (2012), pp. 74-88, at 78.

⁷ H. Albrecht, 'Does Coup-Proofing Work? Political Relations in Authoritarian Regimes Amid the Arab Uprisings', *Mediterranean Politics* Vol. 20 (2015), pp. 36-54, at 39-40.

⁸ S. Levitsky and L. Way, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 4.

⁹ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 15.

¹² Ibid., p. 15.

¹³ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 17.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 43. Levitsky and Way's 2010 book, *Competitive Authoritarianism: Hybrid Regimes after the Cold War*, contains a small inconsistency in the number of the sub-dimensions of linkage that it identifies. In chapter two, it distinguishes six categories of connection: economic, intergovernmental,

technocratic, social, information and civil society. But then on Appendix III, it only notes four: economic, social, communication and intergovernmental. The economic, social and intergovernmental sub-dimensions focus on the same issues, while the information and communication categories are broadly the same. In the interest of thoroughness, this article looks at the six groupings. Ibid., pp. 43-44 and pp. 374-375.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 40-41.

²⁰ According to Levitsky and Way, a Black Knight is a 'counter-hegemonic power[] whose economic, military, and/or diplomatic support helps blunt the impact of U.S. or EU democratizing pressure'. They contend that 'Russia, China, Japan, and France' have each 'played this role ... [in] the post-Cold War period,' by 'using economic, diplomatic, and other assistance to shore up authoritarian governments in neighboring (or, in the case of France, former colonial) states'. Ibid., p. 41. Their definition of a Black Knight power is based on that developed by Hufbauer, Schott and Elliot. G.A. Hufbauer, J.J. Schott, and K.A. Elliot, *Economic Sanctions Reconsidered: History and Current Policy* (Washington DC: Institute for International Economics, 1990).

²¹ Ibid., p. 23.

²² Linkage is measured against four sets of ties: economic (the volume of trade a country has with the West); social (the number of a country's nationals who travel to and live in either Europe or North America); communication (the levels of phone and internet access a country's citizens have); and, intergovernmental (a country's membership or potential membership of either the Organisation of American States or the EU).

The West will have low leverage over a country if: it has either a large economy (with a GDP of at least \$100 billion); or is a major oil producer (pumping 1 million barrels per day or more); or has nuclear weapons. The West will have medium leverage over a country if: it has either a mid-sized economy (with a GDP of \$50-\$100 billion); or is a secondary oil producer (pumping between 200,000 and 1 million barrels per day); or is experiencing

a 'major-security related foreign-policy issue' of importance to the West; or has the backing of a Black Knight patron (resulting in aid worth at least 1 percent of GDP). And the West will have high leverage over a country if it meets none of these criteria. Ibid., pp. 372-378.

²³ Ibid., p. 70.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 70-71.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 376-377.

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 376-378.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 65.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 57.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 57.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

³¹ Ibid., p. 58.

³² Ibid., p. 57.

³³ Ibid., p. 60.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 61.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 376.

³⁶ Way, p. 20.

³⁷ Levitsky and Way, p. 32.

³⁸ Hill, p. 144.

³⁹ For more thorough justifications of the extension of Levitsky and Way's model to Morocco and other regimes with unelected executives, please see: Hill, pp. 144-147 and M. Bogaards and S. Elischer. 'Competitive Authoritarianism in Africa Revisited', *Zeitschrift für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft / Comparative Governance and Politics* Vol. 9 (2015), pp.1-19, at 6-9.

⁴⁰ Kingdom of Morocco (29 July 2011), 'Constitution'. Retrieved from http://www.maroc.ma/en/system/files/documents_page/bo_5964bis_fr_3.pdf, art. 47.

⁴¹ Ibid., arts. 41,42, 48, 53, 56, 57 and 130.

⁴² Kausch, p. 168.

⁴³ These are: economic ('flow of trade, investment, and credit'), intergovernmental ('including bilateral diplomatic and military ties'), technocratic ('the share of a country's elite that is educated in the West and/or has professional ties to Western universities or ... multilateral institutions'), social ('flows of people across borders'), information ('flows of information across borders'), and civil-society ('local ties to Western-based NGOs, international religious and party organizations, and other transnational networks') Levitsky and Way, pp. 43-44.

⁴⁴ It was awarded this status on 13 October 2008.

⁴⁵ Ministère Chargé des Marocains Résident à l'Étranger et des Affaires de la Migration (2015), 'Dar Al Maghrib'. Retrieved from <http://marocainsdumonde.gov.ma/fr/le-minist%C3%A8re/dar-al-maghrib>. World Bank (2015), 'Personal Remittances, Received'. Retrieved from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT/countries?page=3>.

⁴⁶ Institute of International Education (2016), 'International Students in France'. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/Services/Project-Atlas/France/International-Students-In-France>,.

⁴⁷ Ministry of Culture and Communication (May 2017), 'List of Government'. Retrieved from <http://www.maroc.ma/en/content/list-government>.

⁴⁸ M. Ennaji, *Muslim Moroccan Migrants in Europe: Transnational Migration in its Multiplicity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 36.

⁴⁹ World Bank (2015), 'International Tourism, Number of Arrivals'. Retrieved from http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/ST.INT.ARVL?page=1&order=wbapi_data_value_2010%20wbapi_data_value%20wbapi_data_value-first&sort=asc.

⁵⁰ World Bank (2017), 'Morocco: Country Profile'. Retrieved from <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/Views/Reports/ReportWidgetCustom.aspx?ReportName=CountryProfile&Id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=MAR>.

⁵¹ Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network (2017), 'Our Members'. Retrieved from <http://www.euomedrights.org/members/>.

⁵² World Bank (2017), 'Morocco'. Retrieved from <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/morocco>. Levitsky and Way argue that a country has a large economy if its GDP is \$100 billion or more. Levitsky and Way, p. 372.

⁵³ I. Szmolka. 'Party System Fragmentation in Morocco', *The Journal of North African Studies* Vol. 15 (2010), 13-37, at 16.

⁵⁴ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (2015) 'SIPRI Military Expenditure Database'. Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>, Military Expenditure per capita by Country, 1988-2017. In total outlay terms, this equated to an increase from \$3.3 billion in 2011 and \$3.4 billion in 2012 to \$4.06 billion in 2013 and \$4.04 billion in 2014. Ibid., Military Expenditure by Country in Millions of US\$ at Current Prices and Exchange Rates, 1949-2017.

⁵⁵ Ibid., Military Expenditure by Country as Percentage of Government Spending, 1988-2017.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Military Expenditure by Country as Percentage of Government Spending, 1988-2017.

⁵⁷ Hamblin, p. 182. Z. Barany, 'Unrest and State Response in Arab Monarchies', *Mediterranean Quarterly* Vol. 24 (2013), pp. 5-38, at 10.

⁵⁸ Indeed, in stark contrast to 20 February Movement's estimate of between 200,000 and 300,000 participants, the regime claimed that around 35,000 people took part in the demonstrations. M. Abdel-Samad, 'Why Reform and No Revolution: A Political Opportunity Analysis of Morocco 2011 Protest Movements', *The Journal of North African Studies* Vol. 19 (2014), pp. 792-809, at 800.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 801.

⁶⁰ Barany, p. 10.

⁶¹ Yom and Gause, p. 74 and p. 80.

⁶² Barany, p. 29.

⁶³ E. Dalmasso and F. Cavatorta. 'Democracy, Civil Liberties and the Role of Religion after the Arab Awakening: Constitutional Reforms in Tunisia and Morocco', *Mediterranean Politics* Vol. 18 (2013), 225-241, at 230.

⁶⁴ Hamblin, p. 182.

⁶⁵ Volpi, p. 93.

⁶⁶ Hamblin, p. 190.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 182.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 187.

⁶⁹ M.J. Willis, *Evolution not Revolution? Morocco and the Arab Spring*, in L. Sadiki (ed.), *Routledge Handbook of the Arab Spring: Rethinking Democratization* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 435-450, at 439. Volpi, p. 95.

⁷⁰ F. Cavatorta. 'Morocco: The Promise of Democracy and the Reality of Authoritarianism', *The International Spectator* Vol. 51 (2016), 86-98, at 90n.

⁷¹ V. Sakthivel (2014) 'al-Adl wal-Ihsan: Inside Morocco's Islamist Challenge', *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. Retrieved from http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus135_Sakthivel_v2.pdf, p. viii.

⁷² L. Feliu and Ma A. Parejo, *Morocco: The Reinvention of an Authoritarian System*, in F. Izuierdo Birchs (ed.), *Political Regimes in the Arab World: Society and the Exercise of Power*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013), pp. 70-99, at 94.

⁷³ Hamblin, p. 190 and p. 196.

⁷⁴ Volpi, p. 107.

⁷⁵ Abdel-Samad, pp. 803-803.

⁷⁶ Yom and Gause, p. 84.

⁷⁷ Hamblin, p. 182.

⁷⁸ Yom and Gause, p. 84.

⁷⁹ Barany, p. 29.

⁸⁰ Hamblin, p. 199.

⁸¹ Barany, p. 29.

⁸² Amnesty International (2011a), 'Maroc: Etouffement des Manifestations'. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.ch/fr/pays/moyen-orient-afrique-du-nord/maroc-sahara-occidental/docs/2011/maroc-etouffement-manifestations#>, p. 2.

⁸³ Amnesty International (2011a), p. 29. Hamblin, p. 193.

⁸⁴ Abdel-Samad, p. 799.

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch (2011), 'Morocco: Thousands Demonstrate Peacefully'. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/03/21/morocco-thousands-demonstrate-peacefully>, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Hamblin, p. 193.

⁸⁷ Amnesty International (2011b), 'Independent Investigation Urged after Death of Protestor in Morocco'. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2011/06/moroccan-protester-killed-clashes-security-forces/>, p. 1.

⁸⁸ Hamblin, p. 193.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁹⁰ F.G. Gause, 'Why Middle East Studies Missed the Arab Spring: The Myth of Authoritarian Stability', *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 90 (2011), pp. 81-90, at 89.